

FORMER WRECK ON

BIG FOUR BRIDGE.

Jerre Haute Evening Gazette

It Occurred on Friday, October 28,
1892--Engineer Allison Was
Killed.

Feb 24, 1900 - Saturday

The previous casualty on the Big Four bridge in which Engineer Wesley Allison went down with his engine and met a horrible death, occurred shortly after 7 o'clock in the morning, on Friday, October 28, 1892. The catastrophe was the result of a collision between two freight engines which came together with a terrific crash on the bridge which was unable to withstand the strain and collapsed. From the Gazette's report of the accident the following extracts are taken:

"Just before 7 o'clock this morning a horrible collision on the Big Four Wabash river bridge sent two locomotives and a number of cars crashing into the river below and one brave man to eternity.

"It was the most terrific accident that has happened in this neighborhood for a number of years. A freight train running at a dangerous rate of speed, plunged into the engine of another on the river bridge with a crash that could be heard for a mile. For an instant silence like death followed. Then came a second crash, not so loud or startling as the first, but which carried abject terror to the hearts of all who knew the sound. The bridge had given away. One span of the iron bridge had collapsed from the tremendous strain and into the river the two engines were hurled, with Engineer Wesley Allison, still at his post, and drawing after them a number of cars. For some time after the crash nothing could be seen but the cloud of dust, steam and flying fragments of timbers.

When the storm of debris had subsided hundreds of persons hurried to the scene, and stood about looking for the supposed dead and wounded. It was reported at first that all the engineers were missing as well as some of the stock men. This was later found to be a mistake. The loss of life was limited to one brave man, who stuck to his post and went down with the wreck.

Engineer Wesley Allison was the only man missing. He held the throttle on stock train No. 42 and was coming in at high speed. He saw his danger and whistled for brakes, but his signal was either too late or the brakes failed to act. The engine, No. 341, collided with No. 320, which was standing on the bridge, with force sufficient to drive it almost on top of the silent locomotive. Fireman Sowers, of 341, jumped from the engine just outside the bridge and escaped without injury. But the engi-

neer went down with the wreck. Engineer Flynn, of No. 320, heard Allison's cry of horror as he found himself going down, and a man who lives near the scene says he saw Allison struggling in the water a moment afterward, but he was unable to go to his assistance.

Allison's struggles for life were brief and feeble, and there is little doubt that he had received serious injuries before he struck the water.

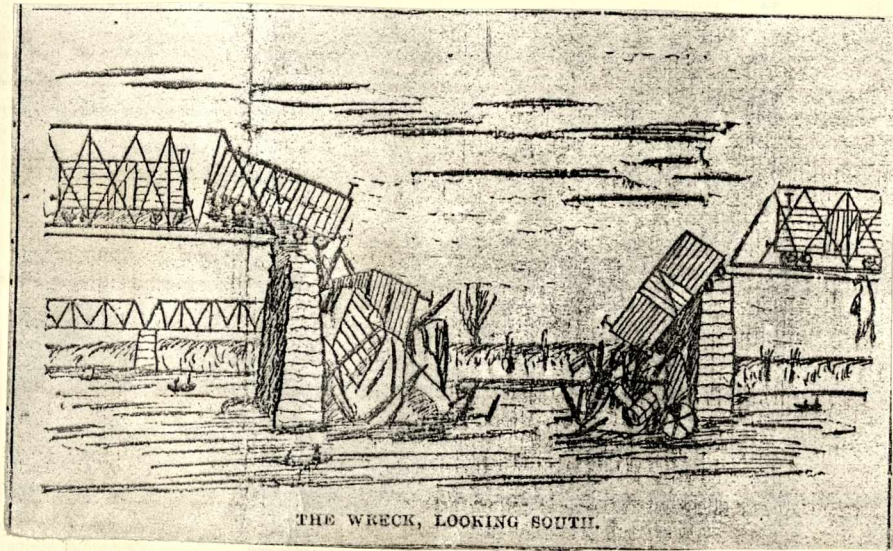
The entire second span of the bridge from the east side was down. Below in a confused heap were the remains of two locomotives and eight or ten cars. Engine No. 320 was completely under water and the other engine lay at the base of the pier in a broken and confused mass. At its side lay three or four stock cars, while from above one car hung suspended from each side in a way that the slightest jar would send them down into the river. The stock cars were loaded with cattle and the noise made by the frightened and injured animals was fairly deafening. About a dozen head of cattle escaped from the wrecked cars and made their way to the land.

"One of the water works employes who witnessed the collision describes the scene as follows: 'I heard both engines whistle. The engine of the train on this side had reached the draw and was at a standstill. The east bound train came around the curve at what appeared to be seventy five miles an hour. It was the fraction of a minute until the crash came. The flying engine seemed to jump into the air like a living monster trying to leap over an obstruction. The shock drove the motionless engine back to the other span. Then the bridge gave way and the engines parted. The second crash was deafening. It took some time for the cloud of dust and steam to subside so I could see what had happened. Then I could see nothing but the piles of rubbish floating away and could only hear the hissing of the steam and the bellowing of the injured cattle.'

Engineer Allison's body was not recovered until April 23, 1893, almost six months after the accident. He was a married man and lived at Mattoon. The Big Four bridge was constructed in 1881.

October 29, 1892

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OCTOBER 29, 1892. 7

DOWN IN THE WABASH.

A Collision of Freight Trains on the Bridge Early Yesterday Morning.

TWO ENGINES AND SEVEN CARS.

A Span of the Big Four Bridge Gives Way Under the Shock—Thousands of Sightseers.

Perhaps it will never be known why the fast, express stock train on the Big Four ran into a freight train standing

on the river bridge yesterday morning, causing the loss of one life and not less than \$30,000 damage. The one life lost is that of Engineer Wesley Allison and he alone could have explained why the train was not stopped.

No. 42 is a fast stock train from St. Louis, carrying live stock and perishable freight. Yesterday morning it came down the five mile grade to the bridge at a terrific speed. It was flagged because a freight train headed westward was standing on the bridge but Engineer Allison did not stop his train and with tremendous force his engine, No. 341, struck No. 320, which was standing on the draw, forcing

it and the train of freight cars behind it back ninety feet when the presence of another train still behind caused the two engines to rise into the air and fall partly sideways. The great weight striking the rods of the bridge broke them and the span gave way. The two engines fell with it and pulled down with them six cars, three empty ones of the west bound train and three loaded ones of the stock train. Whether Engineer Allison went down with his engine or jumped into the river is not definitely known. It is said that he was seen floundering in the water below the bridge but that by the time boats arrived at the spot he had disappeared.

Those who saw the collision say the spectacle was grandly appalling. There was not as much noise as might

have been expected but the escaping steam and flying debris gave the impression that the entire bridge was wrecked. Quickly following the noise of the wreck the bellowing of the imprisoned cattle had a horrifying effect on all who heard it.

The first reports were that several lives had been lost. It was said that a man in charge of the cattle was last seen on the part of the train that went down. It was also thought that at least two of the men of the train crews were in the wreck. Engineer Flynn, of No. 47, was known to have been on his engine but he soon appeared, apparently crawling up on the bridge. When he realized that a collision was inevitable he climbed down from his engine and found safety on one of

the stone piers. There he clung while the engines and cars went to the water thirty feet below. A brakeman on his train ran back on top of the cars to one which stood on the approach to the bridge when he jumped to the ground a moment before the collision. The stories of the escape of others in danger is told by themselves below.

Engineer Flynn had taken his train on the bridge to make room for a local east bound freight to get off a siding. When he saw the stock train coming he tried to back his train but a switch engine and the local freight were in the way and he and his train were caught in a trap. It was when he realized this to be the situation that he left his engine. His fireman, Woods, was at a restaurant near the depot eating breakfast when the accident happened.

There were pitiful scenes with the cattle during the morning. One animal was suspended from the track.

Others were jammed in a car that stood on end, resting against the west pier of the broken span. This car was toppled over later in the day while yet some of the cattle, with broken limbs, were alive and moving in their misery. A few were extricated soon after the collision and reached the shores of the river. The three cars of cattle that went down were shipped by Nelson, Morris & Co., of East St. Louis to Cleveland. The car of poultry was destined for Arthur Jordan, poultry house at Indianapolis.

The news of the accident went over the city in a short time. By 10 o'clock the banks of the river were alive with people but in the afternoon the crowd was the largest. It is estimated that not less than 10,000 people visited the scene during the day. In the afternoon

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a strong wind filled the air with dust and if you see any one with inflamed eyes to-day you may know that he or she was on the river bank. During the afternoon the people were interested in the work of the wrecking crews removing the cars remaining on the bridge on both sides of the broken span.

General Superintendent Peck arrived from Indianapolis on the morning Vandalia train and assumed direction of the work of repair. H. M. Waite, engineer of maintenance of way of this division, was present during the afternoon. He said that as soon as he can get one of the locomotives moved out of its present position it will not take long to provide a temporary span so that traffic may be resumed. Engine No. 320 was out of sight and No. 341 was only partly above the water surface. So complete was the destruction of the seven cars and two engines that no one could tell by looking into the river between the two piers whether there were two cars or ten, or one engine or two.

The bridge is a comparatively new one. The spans, except the draw, for material, cost \$7,000 each and the draw \$9,000. The total cost of the bridge was \$85,000. It is of the truss pattern and was erected by Maurice & Kellogg. The span carried away was erected in 1889. The draw was put in in 1893. Other spans are not older than 1897. Superintendent Peck stated last night that the damage to the equipment would exceed \$20,000. All perishable freight will be shipped via Marshall over the Vandalia until the road can be repaired for use. The Vandalia is also used for passenger trains.

FIREMAN SOUTH.

He Gives a Vivid Description of the Approach Toward the Bridge.

C. P. South, fireman on the east-bound stock train under the ill-fated Engineer Allison, gave his account of the accident as follows: "I can't say much about it, as it is very hard to remember anything that happens under excitement. I find it impossible to tell exactly how, for we were away from the bridge when I noticed the flagman running toward the west end of the bridge, trying to get off. We were quite a distance but my eyes were on the engine standing on the track ahead of us at the time and didn't notice the distance. We were running at a fair speed, how fast it would be difficult to say as opinions would differ on that. An old railroad man would say perhaps twenty or thirty miles per hour, while an inexperienced man would think we were running at

fifty or sixty. We had not been working steam for five minutes or more as it was down grade. I knew we were going to strike quite a while before I jumped. I told Allison I was going to jump and told him to do so too. He came out on the tender when I was standing and I thought he was going to jump. But he went back in the cab. I stayed with the engine as long as I thought it was safe. Just within a few feet of the entrance to the bridge, I again told Allison to jump. He never answered and I sprang off, and fell near the track. My head was on one of the ties or very near it when I came to my senses. I got up and ran on to the bridge and found engineer Flynn of the other engine crawling out from an abutment underneath the bridge. We both got up on a car standing on the bridge and saw engineer Allison floundering in the water. I called two or three times to the people

who live on the east side of the river to get out a boat quick; but they were two long, as it seemed to me, and Allison had disappeared from sight before they reached where I had seen him last. Flynn and myself got into the boat and started across the river. I saw my pants, which I had taken off to put on my working ones, floating in the water. I fished them out and went to the water works engine house where I dried them out. There was \$12 in money and a ring in the pockets. Two dollars in silver and the ring were in one pocket and a \$10 bill in the other. The \$10 was safe, but the silver and ring were gone. I have been on the road since July and this was my second run under Allison. I have been on this run three times, the first time I was not with Allison. On the road down Allison was telling me that he never was in a collision in his life and had never been laid off, not even once, by the company for any misdemeanor. I would not say who is to blame for the trouble. I know who I would blame, but I wouldn't tell even the president of the road. I am glad there was only one killed, and I am awful sorry for poor "Skeet." He was a good man and knew his business. He was very quick in his movements, and I can't understand why he didn't jump when I did. His reason, I suppose, will never be known."

CONDUCTOR STURGEON.

His Story of the Collision—Allison Failed to Whistle.

Conductor J. A. Sturgeon, of the stock train, gives the following as his version of the collision: "I had charge of the train, which was a load of stock

and other freight from St. Louis. I knew Allison, who was killed, as I live in Mattoon where his family is. He is married and has one child, a boy, 10 years old. I had two brakemen with me, Judy and Harth, and the stockman, Thos. O'Neil, of St. Louis, who was with his load of stock, was also on the train with us. I know the road well and when we came to the whistling post, the engineer failed to whistle, and noticing that he failed to apply the air to the brakes, I sent out Judy to put them on. Harth already being out I came out of the caboose to help, but we were near the bridge at the time, and I took the situation in at a glance. I crawled back into the caboose as quickly as possible and jumped off at the hind end. I saw Harth jump, but Judy and O'Neil, the stockman, remained on and were uninjured. I went to the assistance of Harth, who I saw was hurt. I lifted him up and made him easy until a buggy was secured and he was taken to St. Anthony's hospital. I sent a flagman back on the west end as soon as I had my thoughts collected. After that I went and examined the wreck. I found eight out of the twelve cars standing on the track with the brakes set solid. We had twenty cars, fourteen of them having the automatic air brake equipment and twelve of them in working order. Thirteen of the cars were loaded with stock and the rest contained perishable freight. I cannot understand why Allison did not put on the air. He must have been asleep or on the curve side of the train. If he was the fireman was not attending to his duty, as there was plenty of time to check the train. I cannot understand why he did not blow the whistle at the regular place, as it is according to rule to do so, and also to slack up a little. We were running at a fair speed as we were a little behind and anxious to get in ahead of the Mattoon passenger which was due here about twenty minutes from the time of the accident. I feel sorry about "Skeet" as he was always in good spirits, and knew his business. I saw him in the cab when the engines struck and was standing at the curve side of the track. The cab was knocked off when the engines struck, and turned over when it struck the water. I do not think he was caught in the wreck, but was stunned by falling timber, and was drowned."

ENGINEER FLYNN.

He Tells of His Thrilling Experience on the Bridge.

Engineer Flynn, of the extra 47, tells of the accident as follows: "We had pulled upon the bridge to make room for the local to make a siding and expected to back on to a siding as soon as possible to let No. 42 pass. We knew the stock train was several hours late and had sent a brakeman on to flag her. He was still on the bridge when No. 341 came in sight around the curve. I whistled and Allison sounded for brakes once, but his train did not check. He was running very fast. I was there saw no chance to escape a collision so I did the next best thing, looked out for myself. I crawled down on the stone pier just below us and not a moment too soon. I had barely reached there when the crash came. I do not know what the trouble was. Allison had room to at least check the speed of his train. Either the fireman neglected his work or the brakes refused to act."

BRAKEMAN HARTH.

He Was on Top of the Train Near Allison's Engine.

J. E. Harth, the front brakeman of the train, from the west, had his ankle

sprained and was fortunate in getting off with no worse injuries. This was his third trip on Engineer Allison's train. He said that the train left Mattoon at 3:40 yesterday morning and arrived at the bridge some time before 7 o'clock. The train was a stock train and was scheduled to make a fast run. They had to hurry, he said, to get out of the way of No. 2, the passenger train, which was following them. The only time the engineer whistled was about a mile and a half from the bridge coming around a curve. He was on the third car from the engine and they were coming at a fast rate of speed. When they got near the bridge he saw them pass a man with a flag. He started to set the brakes but when he saw the engine standing in the center of the bridge he jumped from the top of the stock car landing half-way down the embankment at the side of the track and from there rolling into a barbed wire fence. He heard the crash of the collision and heard the engineer give one yell and that was all he could tell of the collision. The flagman and the rear brakemen helped him up the embankment and a local freight brakeman rowed him across the river in a row boat and brought him to St. Anthony's hospital.

Harth says that the first ten cars back of the engines were equipped with air brakes and the engineer could have stopped the train very quick. He thought that possibly they might have been applied but failed to work. Harth was taken to his home at Mattoon last evening.

October 29, 1892

DISASTERS (W.V.)

EYE WITNESSES.

Section Hands at Work Near the Bridge
Tell Their Story.

Three of the company's section hands who were working on the track near the bridge tell the story of the accident as witnessed by them: "It was horrible to think of the way those two engines came together in midair. When the west train was noticed coming down the grade, it was certain that a collision would occur. Flynn was trying to back his engine out but there was a switch engine close against him and it seemed he could not move an inch. One of the brakemen was on top of a car near the engine on Flynn's train and he took a race for his life back over the cars and jumped off. The stock train came around the curve at a high speed, and struck with a terrible crash. She was going at such a rate as to knock the standing engine three car lengths at least, piling itself on top. In an instant a swaying mass of iron, coal and freight cars was piled in a heap when the second crash came by the bridge giving way and the debris was hurled into the chasm below, followed by a cloud of dust and steam. The sight was appalling, commingled with the hissing of escaping steam and the bellowing of the injured cattle."

Engineer Allison.

Allison was 31 years of age and lived in Mattoon, where he leaves a wife and a 10 years-old son. He was on the Indianapolis division of the I. & St. L. for the past eleven years, the first three as a fireman and the last eight as engineer. He owned property in Mattoon, where he has lived for the past twelve years, and was a man of regular habits. Last evening a special car containing friends and members of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers arrived here from Mattoon. They offered to render any aid possible. Mr. Allen Tobey, of this city, is a nephew of Allison.

The police and others were dragging the river last evening for Allison's body.

Nine of the cattle cars were hauled back to Paris and brought around over the Vandalia.

A diver was employed yesterday but his nerve failed him when it came to going down in the wreck.

The Vandalia engineers are required to bring their trains to a full stop before moving on the bridge.

Both trains were hours late. No. 47 was due here at 11:30 the night before and the stock train at 1:41 a. m.

There are many persons who have noted with alarm the custom of running trains over the bridge at a high rate of speed.

The river boat Diana was working last night clearing the freight and debris out of the river at the scene of the accident.

The Brotherhood of Engineers, of which Allison was a member, raised a sum of money among the members here to aid in the search for his body.

In an hour after the accident the company had tapped the wires at the east end of the bridge and an operator placed there to handle road messages.

A number of the cattle that were thrown into the river imprisoned in the cars, were fastened in the wreck and had to be shot to put them out of misery.

One of the powerful steam derricks belonging to the C. & E. I. has been secured by the Big Four to enable them to clear the wreck out of the river as quick as possible.

FORMER WRECKS.

The Fall of the Wagon Bridge Years Ago
—Collisions West of the River.

The catastrophe of yesterday recalls a number of other accidents of a somewhat similar nature that have happened near this city in former years. On Saturday, October 3, 1863, a party of six or seven girls started to go over the river to get some pecans. They had gotten to the draw of the wagon bridge when they were met by a drove of cattle which were being driven across. This section of the bridge suddenly gave way and the whole party were drowned. Two of girls drowned were Nannie and Missouri Miller, aged respectively 13 and 17 years. They were the daughters of Henry Miller, who is well known on Wall street.

Several years ago, about Christmas, a freight train broke in two and came together again near the west end of the I. & St. L. bridge. The engine and a large number of cars were thrown off the track and rolled down the embankment. A special track had to be built up the embankment before the engine was got back on the main track.

The collision on the Vandalia on a trestle about fourteen years ago in which Engineer Rankin and Fireman Sanders were killed is well remembered.

DISASTERS (W & F) TRAINS



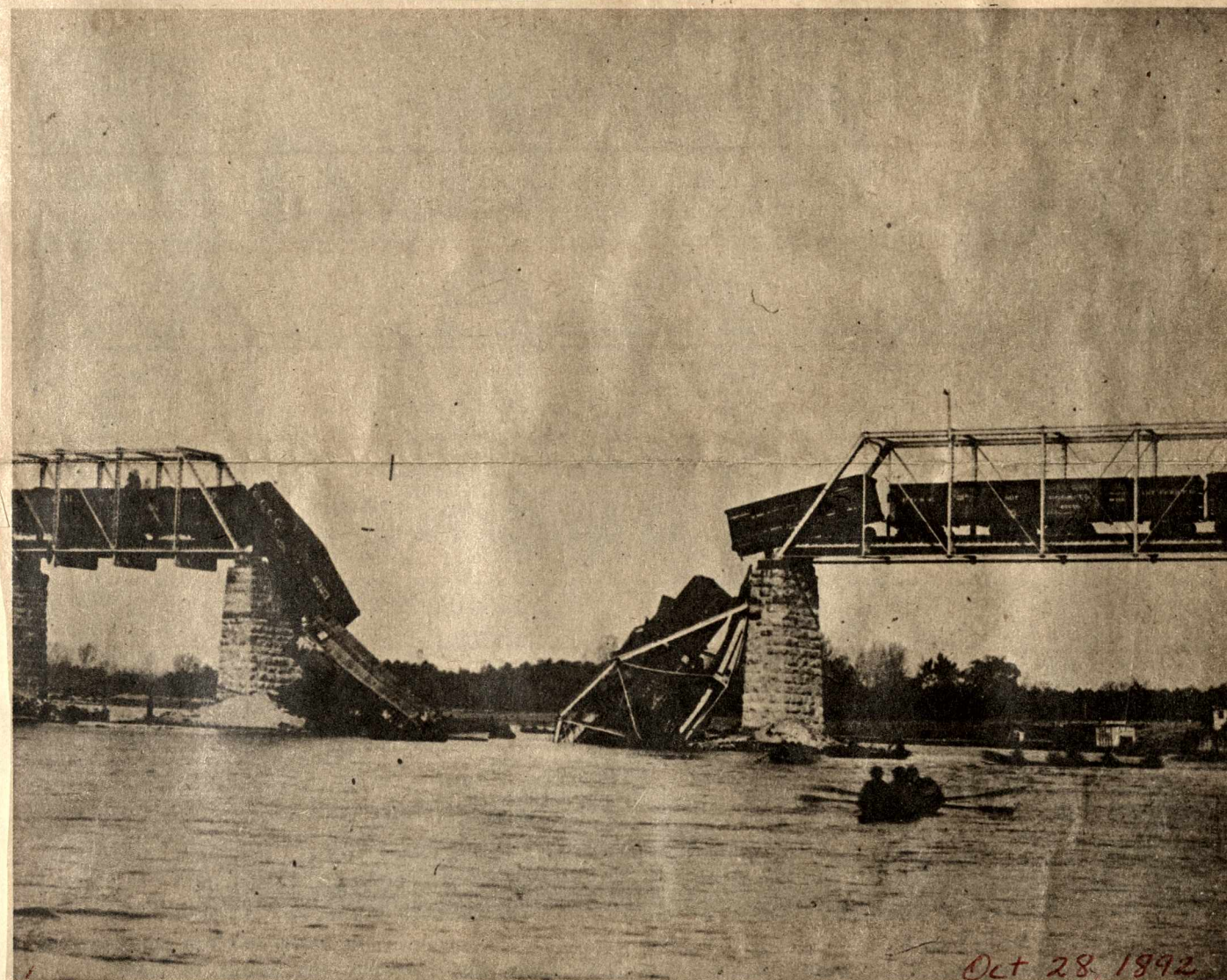
T. Nov 10, 1924

ANOTHER VIEW OF THE railroad bridge disaster, which occurred Oct 28, 1892.

Community Affairs File

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SCENE OF RAILROAD BRIDGE DISASTER on the Wabash River at Terre Haute. The engine, still buried in mud, can be seen at low-water stage. This photo is the property of the Vigo County Historical Society.

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Disasters - Wabash Valley
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